Avon Past 13

The Royal Crescent, Bath

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EDITORIAL

We are pleased to be able to place before you this 'Bath' edition of Avon Past, the content of which exemplifies our interest in local history throughout the County of Avon. It is therefore opportune to extend a welcome to the 'History of Bath Research Group', details of which are contained within this issue's 'Society Profile' on page 40. We would also like to welcome those other groups that have joined us since the publication of Avon Past No.12.In the last year two vitally important issues have been in the forefront of local historical and archaeological interest. The first involves the desperate need for a County Record Office. Both AAC and ALHA have debated this question, and have singly and together applied consistent pressure to to the local authorities to try and gain acceptance for this concept, and the idea seems to be taking root. It may be that finance is the only remaining substantial barrier to this being realised, but it is imperative that pressure is kept up, in order to provide a service that Avon is in frantic need of, and as time goes on, will feel the want of more and more.

The other issue is the welcome growth in the number of small, local museums that have fought their way into being. Thornbury and Keynsham spring obviously to mind. There is a need for local museums of all types and sizes, keeping communities in touch with their roots and filling the gap that can never be fully taken up by the city-based institutions. We wish all museum projects well, and look forward to printing details of their openings in the fullness of time.

To those of our readers who took up the clarion call and protested about the EEC plans to introduce a tax on books, and to those who watched the proceedings with bated breath, you will all no doubt have observed with cries of delight that this item has been (permanently, we hope) rejected!

Finally, keep your eyes and the eyes of your society on developments at Ashton Court and Castle Green, Bristol. Both projects will, I fancy, hold the attention of AAC and ALHA Members for quite a while.

Jennifer Scherr, Pip Jones & Julian Lea-Jones

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AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RIDING SCHOOL AND TENNIS COURT AT BATH

by Trevor Fawcett

Around 1760 the arts of *manège*, or stylish riding, became more fashionable at Bath, especially for women. As exercise and pastime, riding had of course long been a local attraction to spa visitors, male and female alike. Recommended by the medical faculty it also gave ample opportunities for self-display. Handsome mounts, expensive trappings, and modish riding costume might impress the company even more than horsemanship. The keener equestrians rode out on the hills surrounding Bath, which, though restricted in places by enclosure, were increasingly approachable thanks to turnpiking and the construction of Ralph Allen's drive up to Combe Down. Less ambitious riders made shorter excursions along the London and Bristol highways, or headed for the town common where a ring had been laid out by c.1700 in modest imitation of the one at Hyde Park.

Although horses were so indispensable to eighteenth-century economic and social life, the science of equestrianism had made slow progress in Britain. According to one commentator in 1762 few people rode well because apart from army officers and others of ranks few felt the need[1]. Systematic professional instruction was in any case not widely available. William III's riding academy, the first in the country, was a very belated foundation and had not been much imitated.

Nevertheless, a quickening interest in riding as an art can be detected from the mid-eighteenth century with the appearance of various manuals of horsemanship, starting with the reissue of the Duke of Newcastle's old treatise on the subject, continuing with works by Richard Berenger (soon to be appointed the royal riding master), the Earl of Pembroke, Charles Thompson, Philip Astley and others, and culminating in Geoffrey Gambado's handsome volumes towards the turn of the century. Such publications, besides dealing with the training and control of horses and the utilitarian side of riding, also emphasised the graces; their descriptions of fancy steps and sophisticated manoeuvres had analogies in the instruction books of dancing masters. It may well have been one of these authors, the 10th Earl of Pembroke, Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, who was behind the promotion of a riding school at Bath in the late 1760's, around the time that a similar initiative was taken at Bristol. During a career in which he had successively commanded dragoons, light horse, and a brigade of cavalry, Pembroke had come to be regarded as an authority on equestrianism. Furthermore he had the practical experience of his own private riding establishment at Wilton[2].

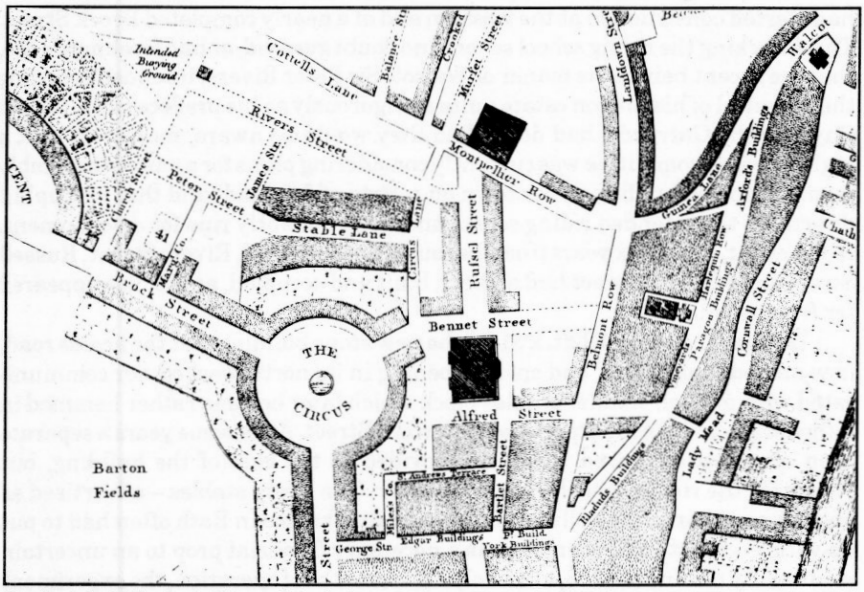
The freehold plot of land on which the Bath riding school would be built was conveyed by John Morford and family, owners of various pieces of ground in the vicinity, to the riding master Captain Charles Poitier and Jonathan Baker in March 1768 at an annual rent of some £43[3]. Choosing a still isolated open-fields site on the lane marking the city's outermost limit (close to the turnpike steeply ascending Lansdown) must have been deliberate. Already the Royal Crescent

had started construction at the western end of a nearly completed Brock Street. Those backing the riding school scheme no doubt guessed, or had foreknowledge, that the recent heir to the manor of Walcot, Sir Peter Rivers, intended realising the potential of his Barton estate quite as vigorously as his predecessors, Robert Gay and the Garrards, had done. And they would be aware, moreover, that a high-powered committee was currently considering plans for a suite of assembly rooms in the expanding upper town on a strip of freehold land that ran uphill directly to the intended riding school and was eminently ripe for development. In the event, five or six years from the launch of the school, Rivers Street, Russell Street and Morford Street had all been built and occupied, and it now appeared far from isolated.

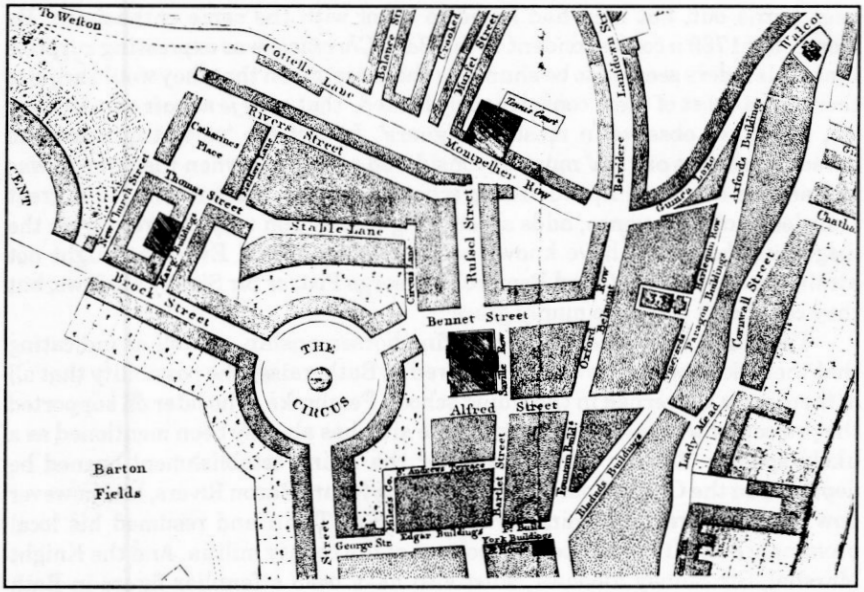
Long and narrow (132ft. x 31ft.) the new stone building met the access road, now named Montpelier, end on. An opening in its north-west corner communicated with a much smaller stables block which later became rather hemmed in by houses from both Montpelier and Morford Street. After some years a separate open air practising area would be provided to the east of the building, but otherwise the riding school was under cover. The livery stables – advertised as notably superior to the polluted 'dungeons' that horses in Bath often had to put up with[4] – must have been seen as a necessary financial prop to an uncertain venture. By the end of 1768, after only a few months of operation, the experiment of weekly horse auctions can be interpreted as an attempt to generate more business and income[5]. For the enterprise had got off to a slow start.

The latent demand from women riders hinted at some years before in the local press ('...now it is a science made/ Of teaching Ladies how to ride')[6] had been borne out, but men had failed to enrol with the same enthusiasm. By November 1769 a correspondent to the *Bath Chronicle* was expressing surprise that male riders seemed to be shunning the place, given that they would acquire there what most of them conspicuously lacked, 'that easy *je ne sais quoi* in their air, which we observe in most Foreigners'. In fact the 'perfect ignorance of horsemanship in *our sex*' must be considered a disgrace when the remedy was at hand in a well-equipped riding school run by a master 'who, to a great knowledge of the science, adds an obliging disposition very different from the disgusting *hauteur* I have known some masters affect'. Everyone might not attain the standards of Lord Pembroke, George Pitt, or Sir Sidney Medows, but they could still aspire to manly grace[7].

The citing of these exemplars of fine horsemanship, as well as indicating that their skills were known and admired at Bath, raises the possibility that all of them were concerned in the riding school. Pembroke, who later on supported the project for a royal tennis court on the site, has already been mentioned as a likely sponsor, though fairly soon after the riding establishment opened he departed on the Grand Tour. George Pitt, the future Baron Rivers, had however now returned from his ministerial posting to Turin and resumed his local prominence as MP for Dorset and colonel of the county militia. And the Knight Marshal, Sir Sidney Medows, must also have been a familiar figure in Bath where his brother-in-law, the 2nd Duke of Kingston, held extensive property. Certainly high-ranking and informed patronage of just this sort can be assumed,



Frederick & Taylor's Plan of Bath (1772) shows the riding school non-naturalistically as a square plot on 'Montpellier Row'. Already new streets are being made or planned in the immediate vicinity.



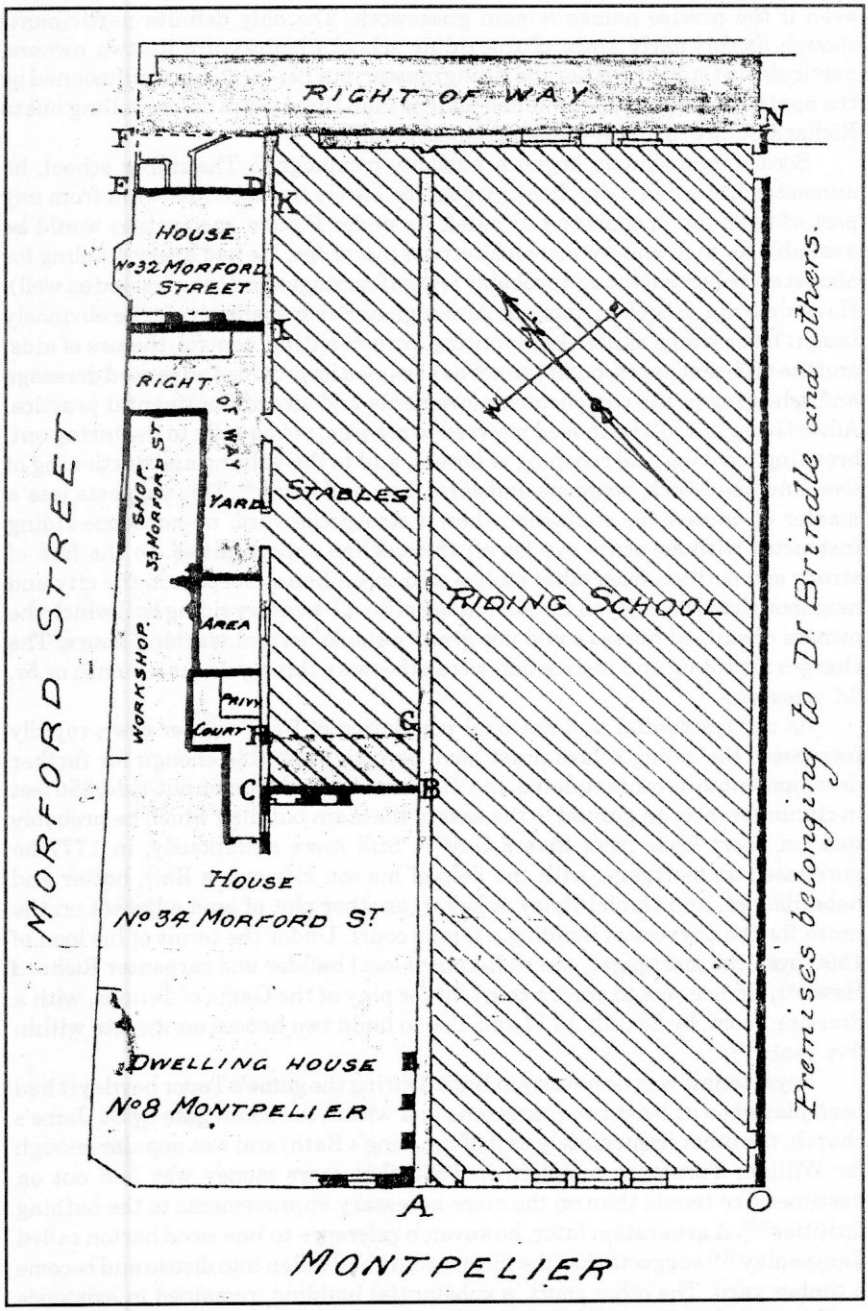
Seven years later the newly built tennis court appears on the 1779 Taylor & Sheldon plan and the local development has been completed.

even if the precise names remain guesswork. The only definite participants though at this early stage of the riding school's history are its two owners, particularly Captain Poitier the riding master; but he – perhaps disillusioned by the apathetic response – remained for less than three years before selling out to Richard Scrace, a stable-keeper from London[8].

Scrace immediately began a publicity campaign[9]. The riding school, he announced, stood in a dry, healthy position barely five minutes' walk from any part of town (an optimistic estimate). As under Poitier, instruction would be available for men and women on alternate mornings. He had livery stabling for almost sixty horses (though probably fewer if carriages had to be housed as well). He could train unbroken animals. Although he never spelled it out, he obviously taught basic riding skills like mounting, correct sitting, control, the use of aids, and the different paces, but it cannot be assumed he provided advanced dressage and schooling in the complicated movements and airs of Continental practice. Advertising in 1772 he indeed referred to *manège*, yet equally to the hiring out, breaking, docking and cropping of horses, and to the valuing and auctioning of live- and deadstock, waggons and carts, hay and corn[10]. This suggests less a master of *haute école* equitation than a straightforward, no-nonsense riding instructor with an acute eye for all the sideline opportunities. In the face of strong competition from other stable- and coach-house-keepers in the city and neighbourhood he enjoyed the advantage of an all-weather riding hall which the owners of stabled horses could use *gratis* outside normal teaching hours. The charges for riding and instruction were otherwise three guineas a month or 5s. 3d. a lesson.

As the residential and seasonal population of Bath's upper town rapidly increased, the riding school must have become profitable enough for further development to be contemplated. In 1774 Scrace added an open out-ride, 350 feet in circumference, on ground to the east of the main building which he probably took on short lease from Rivers Gay[11]. Still more ambitiously, in 1777 he purchased on mortgage, with the help of his son Edward, a Bath hatter and haberdasher, and Daniel Ryley, a baker, another plot of land adjacent on the north for the purpose of building a tennis court. Under the terms of his loan of £800 from the mortgagee, the well-known local builder and carpenter Richard Hewlett, Scrace was to erect a court 'fit for play of the Game of Tennis', with a dressing room, by 28 July 1777 and also to build two houses on the site within five years[12].

Royal tennis was no novelty in Bath. During the game's Tudor heyday it had been played on at least two courts (one just within the south gate by St. Jame's church, the other immediately east of the King's Bath) and was popular enough for William Turner to complain in 1562 that more money was laid out on pastimes like tennis than on the more necessary improvements to the bathing facilities[13]. A generation later, however, a reference to 'one wood barton called Tenyseplay'[14] suggests that the former court had fallen into disuse and become a timber yard. The other court, a substantial building, remained in existence well into the eighteenth century, though probably not serving its original function beyond the seventeenth. Indeed in 1687 the quaker William Penn,



Property Deeds: *Indenture of 26 Nov 1856 with plan of riding school (Courtesy of Bath Record Office)*

visiting Bath, found it made a convenient preaching hall[15]. By that date tennis proper may have been lost to the city, though Gilmore's map of 1694 shows that a fives court now stood outside the west gate.

Several schemes for reviving the game were mooted in the eighteenth century. A tennis court featured in the elder John Wood's never realised project for an imperial gymnasium, a kind of sports centre *avant la lettre*; and on his map of 1735 appears a building near the angle of the newly laid out Gay Street and George Street labelled 'Fives Court' but by its description more likely to have been for tennis: 'an Elegant room of 100 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 40 feet high'. This could well be the tennis court that Ralph Allen's clerk of works, Richard Jones, subsequently claimed that he constructed[16]. Its history remains obscure however and its life may have been short, for it vanishes from local street plans before the mid-century.

A fresh initiative was taken in 1775 when the press announced that sundry noblemen and gentlemen of the turf were proposing to build a complex of tennis court, fives court, and keeper's house, between St. James's Parade and the Borough Walls, and hence close to the Cross and Hot baths with their amenities for washing after exercise. The plan envisaged a hundred subscribers, each starting with a 20-guinea tontine share[17]. Nothing is known about the projectors of this scheme, but out of it came two rival concepts, both publicised in May 1776: a tennis court alone, designed by an eminent (but unnamed) architect to be put up by Richard Scrace near his riding school; or alternatively, a tennis court combined with billiard and coffee rooms which the house painter and colourman, Charles Davis, intended for the north end of Westgate Buildings[18]. Partly perhaps because Scrace's plans were more advanced, partly because less money would have to be raised, it was his scheme that attracted influential backers, foremost among them the Earl of Pembroke. Cruttwell's *New Bath Guide* of 1783 goes so far as to state that Scrace planned his court, based on Parisian precedents, in conjunction with the Earl. There can be no doubt that Pembroke took one or more shares in one or another of the subscriptions since he says as much in a letter to his son, then visiting Bath, a few years later in 1780: 'To whom does the Tennis Court belong now? J'y suis intéressé, being a £50 subscriber. Is the Marker a tolerable player, and how are the racquets, and balls, etc?'[19].

No expert in building tennis courts, Scrace badly underestimated the costs likely to be involved. The initial subscription, to judge from his later statement of finances, cannot have aimed at raising more than £1,000, and in the event may have amounted to only £700[20]. Nevertheless, between autumn 1776 and summer 1777, the ambitious new building (116ft. x 51ft. including the passageway and changing rooms) went up on the ground behind the riding school and at right angles to it. Nowadays housing the Bath Industrial Heritage Centre, its impressive dimensions can still be appreciated.

The court opened for play in September 1777 under the direction of one Hulet, doubtless a professional from the French *jeu de paume* establishment[21]. France had continued to be the stronghold of royal tennis even in its relative decline, the prestige of this subtle and intellectual sport being such that De

Garsault's treatise on the subject in 1767 came out under the auspices of the Académie des Sciences. In Bath its revival began promisingly, though contemporary references to the court are sparse and we have no description of its interior or to the play – except that London rules were followed. One early performer there, in the winter of 1777-8, made use of the riding school as well. In a letter to George Selwyn, his fellow politician and socialite, Anthony Morris Storer remarks: 'I play at whist from morning till night; take the dust in the *manège*, and play at tennis when there is no snow to prevent me [reaching the court]'[22].

Meanwhile Scrace had landed in financial trouble. His £800 mortgage loan (now owed not to the builder Hewlett but to a Bath bank) was due for repayment. Having handed over responsibility for the riding school to his son, Richard Scrace junior, he set about organising another subscription in which he proposed to issue forty shares of £20, each earning 5% half-yearly interest, redeemable by himself after three years[23]. In the ensuing months of uncertainty this offer was withdrawn, an auction of the premises announced and then postponed, a fresh subscription tried, and finally another sale advertised[24]. By autumn 1780 the tennis court was in the hands of Arthur Molesworth and his daughter Elizabeth of Armagh and Dublin; Hulet had already left and the vacancy which the Earl of Pembroke had been concerned about filled temporarily by a marker from the famous James Street court in London, a man named Mucklow[25]. A year or so later a more permanent appointment was made, and this player, Hathway, continued for the next nineteen years, in which time he was said to have accumulated a fortune[26].

Although he had now shed the burden of the tennis court (and despite the success of his actress daughter on the Bath and London stages), Scrace found his affairs still failing to prosper. When in 1784 Parliament imposed duties of two guineas a year on saddle, coach, and race horses (increased further in 1789), plus £5 a year on horse dealers outside London, it may have been the last straw in inducing him to sell the riding house with its stables and outrides. Ironically the new purchaser was his former usher, assistant and rough-rider, Jonathan Dash, who had set up as a riding instructor on his own account in 1778 during the time of Scrace's financial crisis[27]. At that time Dash had suggested he was responding to complaints from would-be riders who were unable to manage their mounts on the public highways 'notwithstanding they have been taught at a Riding School' – a dig perhaps at Scrace's methods. During his six years of self-employment based on the Raven stables he had probably made useful contacts in the racing community which would now stand him in good stead as the Bath racecourse, formerly laid out with a stand, coach houses and stabling on Claverton Down, crossed the river to a new site on Lansdown. By 1786 the riding school was also being used for race stud purposes[28].

With Dash's takeover the elder Scrace, now approaching 70, was reduced to a stable-hand, and remained so until he announced his retirement in 1789, 'not being able to do the business required of a servant... not able to bear the fatigue in this laborious business'. But, he added, 'Mr. Dash and I part friendly, and he indulges me with the use of the house I live in, rent free, so long as me and my

wife live[29]. His son Edward, the haberdasher, had died in 1787; his wife died in 1790 after 47 years of marriage.

The 1780's were punctuated by various initiatives on Dash's part. There were now several outrides to the school which he allowed to be used for exercising horses before 10.00am or after 3.00pm. Between these hours he gave lessons, charging three guineas for sixteen. He increased the number of dressed mounts. Late in 1785 he started horse sales, but the specialist auctioneer whom he employed on commission, Charles Demander, found the riding school too far from the centre of Bath to tempt enough custom and therefore soon removed his business to the Pelican Inn. By 1786 Dash was also keeping the odd champion racing stallion at the stables for covering mares, as already mentioned[30]. Active promotion of the Montpelier establishment was becoming even more important as another riding school came into prominence nearer the city centre, in Monmouth Street leading into the Upper Bristol Road. Here a covered amphitheatre was built and equipped with the fashionable Buzaglo stoves to encourage winter use and to permit displays of horsemanship and circus acts. From 1788 Ryle's Amphitheatre and Riding School, as it was called, hosted regular visits of equestrian teams from London and elsewhere, particularly from Astley's and Franklin's. Firework displays were another attraction, and in due course pony races[31].

During the last decade of the century Dash faced competition on several fronts as well as personal tragedy in the death of two of his sons, one of whom, the 18-year-old William, was reputed already among the best horsemen in the country. Ryle's riding school kept up its rivalry. In 1796 the laying-out of a brand-new, serpentine ride at Sydney Gardens stimulated the development of stabling and other facilities in Bathwick. Horse auctions were now staged at several venues, though that did not deter Dash from trying them again in 1796, following a successful sale of cavalry mounts belonging to the Essex troop, and on a weekly basis in 1798. This latter attempt provoked him into a rare expression of character:

> Few persons have greater experience in the Purchase and Sale of Horses, than J. Dash – his Study, his Delight, and his Livelihood have depended upon the training of that noble Animal; and, he consequently trusts, that he has some judgement in the qualities and abilities of a good Horse[32].

Thanks to his professional reputation, honesty, and business acumen, the riding school was now flourishing, though the physical extent of his small empire had both expanded and contracted during his tenure. In 1788 he had acquired on mortgage from Elizabeth Molesworth the whole tennis court property, but then in 1795 lost the use of all the ground to the east along Montpelier, including a structure erected at some date along the east wall of the riding school (for stables or coach-house?), other stabling, a cottage, and perhaps more seriously the chief outride. All this land belonged to Rivers Gay who now granted the freehold, for a consideration of £300, to the committee charged with building a 'Free Church' to serve the vastly increased numbers of the Walcot poor. After three years of construction Christ Church, as it became known, was

consecrated in November 1798[33].

Riding continued to be one of Bath's 'comforts', however, as the diaries and correspondence of some of its visitors attest. Elizabeth Collett in 1792 was a typical enthusiast, sallying forth most days onto the Upper or Lower Bristol roads, the Wells road, or the downs – those hills which an earlier, less determined visitor had found 'so steep and wearisome, that it requires no small degree of resolution to take that exercise which the physicians invariably recommend'[34]. Towards the close of the century, however, the delightful, exhilarating, health-provoking outings on the 'fine turf of Lansdown', as one 'Well-Wisher to Bath' phrased it, were under threat from a further bout of enclosure[35]. Riding and coach excursions on Claverton Down were being restricted about the same period.

Since the Montpelier riding school had always enjoyed the asset of proximity to Lansdown, this loss of access may have been a contributory factor in Edward Dash's decision to sell in 1801. The previous year his father announced that he was disposing of his famous chestnut gelding Cripple and, on account of his growing infirmity, handing over the entire enterprise to Edward[36]. Whether by family agreement or not, Edward Dash lost no time in putting the tennis court on the market, pointing out that it was considered to be 'one of the completest... in Europe, not only by its improvements upon all other Courts, but... [from] its adjoining the Riding House, and the conveniences of different exercises for health and amusement'. In reference to John Milton, Hathway's successor, Dash added that the 'present occupier is by no means a good player, but a good marker; very assiduous to his business and civil'[37]. Milton paid £40 rent out of his annual takings[38].

Hardly was the conveyance of the tennis court completed (in June 1802 to the Hon. Charles Dormer) than Edward Dash gave notice that the riding school was available for let[39]. In fact it looks as though the property was soon sold, passing into the hands of William Stevenson. With that the eighteenth-century story ended and the aftermath may be summarised briefly.

The Stevenson family kept the riding school going, until the 1840's in spite of rivalry from a new institution in nearby Cottle's Lane run by J. Ennever, and the long-standing competition from Monmouth Street successively orchestrated by Samuel Ryles, J. Stokes, and 'that good-looking fellow' Hippona Mead, who is represented in *The English Spy* of 1826 as being surprisingly free with his pupils' Christian names – 'set upright, Sally; more forward, Eliza; keep your rein-hand more square, Ellen'[40]. By 1846 the Montpelier premises were in use by a stable-keeper and dairyman, and some seven years later the building that adjoined the old riding school on the east was converted into a Roman Catholic chapel and later school. Returned to Anglican ownership this later became an annexe hall to Christ Church, while the riding house, possibly somewhat rebuilt, turned into the Rifle Volunteer Drill Hall. Its original function was not wholly forgotten though, for in this century it reverted to a riding school once more. Second World War bombing finally saw to its demolition.

Meanwhile the tennis court underwent its own transmutations. Although still 'respectably attended by the lovers of athletic sport' as late as 1809[41], it was

not to last. Soon the nets, rackets, and playing costumes were removed, and all the jargon of hazard and chase, penthouse and dedans, was forgotten. Late in 1816 the recently founded monitorial Girls' Free School removed from Grove Street and took up occupation in the far more spacious Montpelier building[42]. Over the next decade and a half it was filled on weekdays with poor Walcot children under instruction in the rudiments of reading, plain-needlework, and household duties. In the 1830's, after a short-lived attempt to revive it for tennis[43], it became a malthouse, and then until the 1960's had a history of various industrial uses. Royal tennis in Bath came to an end; but not in outlying Weston, where a court was in existence at the Crown and Anchor tavern in 1848[44]. When fresh talk of bringing tennis to Bath broke out in 1880, it was the novelty of lawn tennis, an altogether simpler game, that was under discussion.

Notes

(*Bath Chronicle* is abbreviated to *BC*)

(1) Charles Thompson, *Rules for Bad Horsemen* (London, 1762) 1-3

(2) Sidney Herbert, 16th Earl of Pembroke, *A Catalogue of the Paintings... at Wilton House* (London, 1968)26-7, 29-30. The 10th Earl's treatise on 'military equitation' first came out in 1761. The new Bristol riding school is mentioned in *BC* 16 Nov 1769. Nobility and gentry founded an Edinburgh school about the same period.

(3) The surviving deeds to the riding school and tennis court sites, with some measured plans, are at the Bath City Record Office. An obituary note on Poitier in *BC* 22 Dec 1796 calls him 'Captain'.

(4) *BC* 16 Nov 1769

(5) *BC* 1 Dec 1768

(6) *BC* 9 Aug 1764

(7) *BC* 17 Nov 1769. Medows set up what Pembroke later termed an *'équitation laboratoire'*.

(8) *BC* 6 Dec 1770

(9) *BC* 13 Dec 1770. For the stabling capacity see *BC* 16 Nov 1769.

(10) *BC* 22 Oct 1772

(11) *BC* 1 Sept 1774

(12) Indentures of lease and release 23-24 Jan 1777: see Note 3 above.

(13) Fully quoted in *Englishmen at Rest and Play... 1558-1714*, ed. R. Lennard (Oxford, 1931) 4.

(14) P. Rowland James, *The Baths of Bath in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (n.p., 1938) 98-9.

(15) HMC 13th Rpt. App.Pt.1. *The MSS of the Duke of Portland*, vol.3,403.

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(17) *BC* 28 Sept 1775.

(18) *BC* 2 and 9 May 1776

(19) *Pembroke Papers, 1780-1794*, ed. S.C. Herbert, Baron Herbert (London, 1950) 78.

(20) Subscriptions were still being solicited in late 1776 – *BC* 28 Nov 1776.

(21) *BC* 25 Sep 1777; *New Bath Guide* (1780) 38 and (1783) 37.

(22) John Heneage Jesse, *George Selwyn and his Contemporaries*. New ed. (London, 1882) vol.3, 266.

(23) *BC* 30 April 1778

(24) *BC* 4 and 25 June 1778, 26 Nov 1778, 7 Jan 1779.

(25) *BC* 26 Oct 1780.

(26) *BC* 5 June 1800.

(27) *BC* 30 April 1778.

(28) *BC* 13 April 1786. The Claverton Down facilities are referred to in *BC* 6 Sept and 6 Dec 1770; the racecourse dated from 1721 or earlier. In 1777 Claverton races were said to have attracted some 800 carriages and a crowd of 20,000 spectators – *BC* 18 Sept 1777.

(29) *BC* 9 April 1789.

(30) *BC* 3 Nov 1785, 23 Feb, 13th April and 5 Oct 1786.

(31) For Ryle's establishment see *BC* 28 Feb, 13 March and 18 Dec 1788 and many subsequent advertisements.

(32) BC 13 Dec 1798

(33) BC 12 Feb and 14 May 1795, 8 Nov 1798.

(34) 'Diaries of Elizabeth Collett', ed. H. Collett, pt.2 f.13 (MS. B914.238, Bath Reference Library); Richard Joseph Sulivan's 'Tour of 1778', printed in William Mavor, *The British Tourist's or Traveller's Pocket Companion.* 3rd ed. (London, 1807-09) vol.3, 12.

(35) *Bath Herald* 22 April 1797. For earlier Lansdown enclosure see Sarah Markham, *John Loveday of Caversham, 1711-1789* (Wilton, 1984) 311.

(36) *Bath Herald* 24 May 1800.

(37) *BC* 5 June and 11 Sept 1800.

(38) *BC* 18 Sept 1800.

(39) *BC* 17 Sept 1801, where the recent brisk business at the riding school is mentioned. Edward Dash had completed repairs a year before – *BC* 16 Oct 1800.

(40) Bernard Blackmantle, *The English Spy* (London, 1826) vol.2, 302.

(41) *The Improved Bath Guide* (Bath, Wood & Cunningham, c.1809) 79-80.

(42) *BC* 5 Dec 1816.

(43) It re-emerges fleetingly as a royal tennis court run by J.M. Maddock in H. Silverthorne, *Bath Directory... to April 1833* 151.

(44) *Hunt & Co's Directory and Court Guide for Bath, Bristol and Wells* (1848) 133. The proprietor was James Slingo.

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THE LADIES ASSOCIATION

by T. Alexander-Macquiban

But for the discovery of a bundle of papers in a box belonging to the Davies-Cooke family of Owston Hall near Doncaster, the existence of the charitable works of Lady Isabella King in the early years of the 19th century around the current Avon area would have passed unnoticed. This distant relative of the Earl and Countess of Kingston of whom little has been discovered, deserves recognition for her heroic efforts at the beginning of the 19th century to establish a Protestant Society for ladies of nobility and gentility. Indeed Southey, a contemporary of hers, did hold her up as the "Clara or Theresa of Protestant England, labouring for the benefit of her sex" and lauded this notable experiment in communal living. This article seeks to bring to a wider audience the endeavours of Lady King to create a 'convent' for the supporters of the rising Evangelical Revival, especially those who were disadvantaged – not from the ranks of the poor, but the more privileged members of society amongst whom she mixed.

As early as 1813, Lady King drew up a list of names of those who desired to lend their aid to a proposed plan of association "amongst women of independent fortune for the purposes of lessening the expense of living to those whose means are more limited". She aimed to provide a respectable home to young ladies "of good family and fortune who have lost their parents" and to offer "cheap asylum to the orphan daughters of gentlemen especially of those brave men who have fallen for their Country". £6,000 was needed to set up such an institution. The obvious place for its location was Bath, a centre for social activity in the South-West, where, despite such affluence, Lady King found that "individuals rolling in wealth do often refuse to assist their poor relations". It was to these distressed womenfolk that she intended to offer a lifeline. Such was her commitment to the scheme that she invested many thousands of pounds of her own fortune to attain her vision of a "Society of women – *English Women* – belonging to the Church of England" who could come together to live in peace, to counter the trends of the day towards a secular and irreligious lifestyle.

Funds were slow at coming in, because of the universal distress of the times which made it difficult to solicit contributions even from the very rich. One can imagine also that many were prejudiced against such a scheme. Lady King had to counter much misunderstanding about the nature and aims of the Institution which gave the Bath Gossips a field day, subjecting her to "extreme impertinence". Some thought that it was to be a very strict house where piety and sobriety would preclude any form of enjoyment. Lady King was anxious to point out in defence of her scheme that there were no rules against visits to friends and excursions into Bath or engagement in amusements of any sort but that she desired to encourage "home occupations... conducive to real happiness" and not merely to provide a base for young ladies to be introduced into Bath society with all its snares and temptations, nor to give an abode for young ladies seeking advancement in life at the expense of their neighbours. It was an experiment in

communal living which needed candidates "not adverse to a retired life".

Despite the opposition from some and the misunderstanding of others, her scheme met with much approval and the *Ladies Association,* as it came to be known, was founded in 1815 with an impressive list of supporters – two Duchesses, a Marchioness, four Countesses and a Viscountess, two Bishops, an Earl and other nobility. The names on the Prospectus did not however always mean that their subscriptions were paid regularly or on time! Lady King managed to lease a property at Bailbrook near Bath where she started to put into practice the ideas she had for the running of her Institution. She had the encouragement of Reginald Heber, later to become Bishop of Calcutta, who commended the admittance of ladies of "personal merit" to further the aims of the Association. She received royal patronage which gave much status to her work, when in December 1817 Queen Charlotte visited the Institution and called it a "blessed asylum". Yet her interest too dropped off and her subscriptions remained unpaid. Lady King was fortunate in securing the help of Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, son of a Bristol Merchant, who was an MP from 1797. As President of the Bath and West of England Society from 1803 to 1817 he retained a great interest in the affairs of his native area, including the welfare of Lady King's experimental scheme. It was chiefly he who helped her through the difficulties of the early 1820s when Bailbrook was put up for sale by its owner. The Association could not afford to buy the property which was subsequently sold to a West India merchant-gentleman. It had to look elsewhere for a house in Clifton, bought from the Rev. Charles Gore for £3,500, £600 of which was provided by Lady King herself. She was the Lady President of the Association, the head of the household who was the guiding force of the whole organisation. In 1823 this consisted of Lady King and three Lady Renters or Guardians who paid high yearly rents for their rooms to give support to the Institution. Then there were ten Lady Associates and four Assisting Ladies on the endowed fund, comprising two invalids, the almoner and the secretary who gave administrative help to Lady King. The early hope of providing bursaries for the assistance of orphaned daughters of noble families and their education had come to nought because of the lack of financial contributions. The move to Bristol meant that the close ties with the ladies of Bath society were weakened and their subscriptions less easy to collect. Yet the list of Patrons and Trustees, headed by the Bishop of Durham and Earl of Shaftesbury respectively, was still indicative of the measure of support the Association received from some sections of the nobility.

Regrettably the affairs of the House were not all sweetness and peace as the Lady President in her piety and naivety had hoped. In 1826 the Rules of the Institution were changed and a new office introduced which Lady King later judged to be "of no use whatever and much mischief". A Lady Superior, elected by the inmates for "promoting cheerfulness and unanimity, composing little differences and encouraging every good feeling and useful occupation, kindly advising her companions in private of anything that may seem objectionable in their conduct as regards their Christian profession and the welfare of the community" seems to have been a grave mistake for the unity of the house, setting Lady President and Inmates at loggerheads. So too the rules on "dress

and appellation" which laid down that "no whimsical, shewey or expressive style of dress" should be worn. This merely produced cabal and party spirit and caused ridicule in the House. Even the rules about evening company, the names of whom had to be notified to the Lady President, had to be rescinded because of the mischief that arose. A few of the young members who came seem to have been infected with hatred, envy and contempt of their neighbours, jealousies and sudden intimacies and other odious qualities which disturbed the fellowship. Lady King looked back wistfully to the time at Bailbrook when the Institution had been in its happiest state, when ladies did not visit each other in their own bedrooms and there was no "intimacy formed merely for the indulgence of idle gossip or foolish egotism". The moral character and respectability of the Institution was sadly in decline. In 1830 Lady King wrote to a Miss Willyams who had handed in her notice of intention to quit Cornwallis House. She tried to answer her charges of the "quixotic search after usefulness" which beguiled life in the Institution, seeing its purpose as "obtaining a quiet permanent and independent house". She regretted that Miss Willyams had not found "a Society... of consistent and self-denying Christians". May be it had not come up to her expectations, but she still considered it a "particularly suitable abode for a sincere and humbly religious character... not founded on mere worldly principles. Though in the present bustling and itinerating age few may find it to their taste, yet I do not despair of seeing it again what it was for a few years, the valued abode of such as can feel thankful for providence for directing their steps to such a peaceful home".

Coupled with internal troubles, there were other difficulties. Sir Benjamin Hobhouse wrote to the Bishop of Salisbury, one of the Patrons, in 1828 about the advisability of avoiding the holding of a General Meeting because they were such contentious occasions. There was a decline in the number of Patrons as some had died. There was a shortage of funds to further the work of the Association by appointing a full time Superintendent. There was a very poor attendance at meetings of the Management Committee as notes against a list of their names indicated "Once a zealous friend", "no interest in it", "has never cared about it". There was an increasing air of pessimism about the affairs of the Institution which took their toll on the Lady President. From 1828 onwards, Lady King became disillusioned and resigned to the failure of her grand scheme. She wished to resign because her office had become "so arduous", such were the internal dissensions and external desertions she had to face. Her health declined, her spirits started to fail her, she expressed bitterness that she would have to leave the Institution in which she had hoped to be until she died, just because of the "disaffection and cabals of a few less amiable inmates". Yet all her closest friends and allies were advancing in years, and she knew that the end could not be put off. The house was put up for sale but early hopes of its purchase by the Bishop of Gloucester failed. It took five years for Isaac Cooke of Henbury to wind up the affairs of the Association, not least because of the difficulties of deciding how to dispose of the funds realised on the sale of Cornwallis House. Eventually this was sold in 1837 and it was determined that one third of the residue of funds should be allocated to the purchase of the Bristol Corporation

Livings (to present "pious", ie Evangelical, Clergymen to the parishes of St. Philip and Jacob, St. Paul, St. James and Temple), and the remainder to the Rev. William Carus Wilson for the Clergy Daughters' School at Casterton. At the end of the year Lady King wrote to Isaac Cooke expressing her delight that the business was now complete: "to have every part of the funds devoted to good purposes is my earnest wish. Feeling myself to be so near the end of life's journey, I would fain be rid of all worldly concerns".

Lady King's project failed just as Southey had hinted in his report on the Institution when he had written that "it remains to be seen whether this generation will have the honour of supporting it or the disgrace of suffering it to fail". Protestant monasticism did not take root in the too fertile ground of Bath or Clifton. The ladies of fashionable society were not sufficiently pious to adhere to the restraints of a community as envisaged by Lady King. Nor were her friends sufficiently loyal to the high ideals that she held. In the end she gave seventeen years of her life and much of her private fortune, for what? She had no regrets at "undertaking the welfare and happiness of many estimable persons", even at the risk of personal discomfort. Though the Institution failed in the last resort, other worthy causes along similar lines to those she hoped to establish were recipients of her generosity. Lady Anson, one of the four to support her to the end wrote in encouragement: "you my dear friend, devoted the last years of your life and much of your substance to a scheme which in theory held out a prospect of much permanent good and in the quality it actually did for some years produce".

Here was a real Protestant saint dedicated to the cause of her fellow women, their comfort and welfare in a Christian community. Her labours are only now being recognised, nearly 150 years later.

Acknowledgements

Permission to quote from the archives of the Davies-Cooke Family has been given by Mrs. K. Davies-Cooke. The papers are deposited in the Doncaster Archives Department, King Edward Road, Balby, Doncaster, to whom grateful acknowledgement is given.

BATH AND THE METHODISTS

by Bruce D. Crofts

Introduction

Methodist influence was initially encountered in Bath when John Wesley made the first of his 100 visits in 1739. To understand why he came we must turn to Epworth in Lincolnshire where John was born in 1703. He was the 15th of 19 children, of whom 8 died in infancy. His mother Susannah was herself the 25th child! Her influence was perhaps greater than her husband's on her talented sons for she found time to give them all a primary education. They mastered their alphabet by their 5th birthdays. Discipline was such that they "feared the rod and learned to cry quietly".

John's father Samuel was the unpopular Rector; his politics and pointed preaching were both disliked. His parishioners cut the legs off his dog, and twice set fire to the house. When only 5, John was rescued from the burning building in the nick of time; later he described himself scripturally as "a brand plucked from the burning", an early sign of Divine intention.

John was undoubtedly clever and prepared to work hard. He reached Christ Church, Oxford at 17; five years later he was ordained deacon, and three years later priest, by Bishop Potter. He and his brother Charles formed a group of friends dubbed "Methodists", a quaint name said to apply to an ancient school of physicians who insisted on regular diet and exercise; they were also known as the "Holy Club" and "Bible moths". Here the brothers met George Whitefield and formed what Charles described as "the three-fold cord that can never be broken". In 1735, their father having died, the brothers set off to work in the colony of Georgia. Everything went wrong and they returned home fed up to the teeth. After being greatly influenced by the Moravians, and the writing of Martin Luther, there occurred on 24th May 1738 the great turning point in John Wesley's life. Somewhat unwillingly he attended a service in London and "felt his heart strangely warmed". The foundation was laid for the great evangelical revival, described by David Lloyd-George as the greatest religious movement for 250 years. During the next half-century Wesley was destined to become the best known man in England; he was to travel 250,000 miles mainly on horseback and preach on 40,000 occasions of which 150 were in Bath.

It was George Whitefield who introduced John to open-air preaching. The former was a vehement and exciting orator; John chose to be calm, measured and logical. Small groups would continue to meet after his preaching and so the first Methodist societies began to form. There was no attempt or desire to break with the Church of England and meetings were arranged not to clash with Anglican services. Sometimes people reacted rather strangely to Wesley's direct way of convincing his hearers of their sinfulness; their groanings and even convulsions could have seemed quite frightening.

Bristol with all its influence and importance was destined to become the Wesley's main centre for thirty years. The meeting place erected in 1739 and known today simply and with affection as "the New Room" became the first Methodist chapel in the world. Methodists never considered themselves as

Dissenters but to be on the safe side had the building licensed for public worship in 1748, an action described by Charles as "needless, useless and senseless"! The statue outside of John on horseback tells how he rode: he is reading and the reins are loose. So he would travel up to 90 miles in a day, sometimes up to 20 hours in the saddle, time not to be wasted!

John Wesley and Bath

Wesley's dates are very significant when we study the rise and fall of Georgian Bath – 1703 to 1791. He was therefore a contemporary of Richard Nash, Ralph Allen and John Wood the Elder. He survived them all.

John Wesley kept a daily journal – a masterpiece of English literature –26 volumes – 1 million words and from its pages we derive precise information about his movements. Thus we know that he first came to Bath on April 10th, 1739. He visited Bath more than anywhere else, apart from London, Bristol and Kingswood. It was also the first place after them for a Methodist Society to be formed and was therefore the first breakthrough in a nation-wide movement. And as we shall see it was one of the worst possible places to choose, and initially the least successful.

At 5.00pm on that fateful day "on a meadow on the hill close to the town so that they could see us from Lady Cox's in the square plainly", Wesley preached to 2,000 people. Perhaps it was near the present entrance to Victoria Park? Queen Square had just been built with its new 70 foot obelisk in the centre. The Circus was yet to come.

We don't know which house Lady Cox lived in – she was the widow of Sir Richard Cox of Dumbleton, Glos. and one of Whitefield's early converts.

After a meal at the Three Cups – which was then in Northgate Street Wesley preached at 7.00pm in Gracious Street or Court, a little alley between Walcot Street and Broad Street which contained 15 houses. Hardly room for a large audience! Broad Street Place is its name today.

Two weeks later he preached to 1,000 in the meadow where "the rain kept the congregation small", and later from the window of the house of a silversmith, Mr. Dibble. On May 8th he moved down-town to Mr. Marchant's field at the Ham (both familiar names in the Southgate - Manvers Street areas today). A fortnight later Wesley was surprised that his audience was not only working and artisan class, for "there were several fine things among them". No doubt they reported back to the King of Bath, for Wesley was later tipped off to expect trouble next time he came. Indeed he might be well advised to stay away, for Beau Nash intended to turn him out!

The classic confrontation that occurred on that June day is now enshrined in our history books. The turn-out was larger than ever. The King of Bath appeared, in his 60's, and at the height of his career.

"By what authority do you address these people?"

"From Jesus Christ by the (now) Archbishop of Canterbury by the laying-on of hands."

Nash pointed out that open-air meetings were illegal under the Conventicle

Acts, Wesley countered this by saying that this only covered "seditious" meetings not religious ones.

"You frighten people out of their wits."

"Sir, did you ever hear me preach?"

"No".

"How can you judge of what you never heard?"

"Sir, by common report."

"Pray Sir are you a J.P. or the Mayor of this city?"

"No, I am not" replied Nash.

"Why then, sir, pray by what authority do you ask me of these things?"

No reply. Wesley went on:

"Give me leave sir to ask. Is not your name Nash?"

"Sir, my name is Nash".

"Why then, Sir, I trust common report is no good evidence of truth. I dare not judge you by common report." After a pause Nash recovered sufficiently to say:

"I desire to know what this people come here for."

An old woman shouted "You, Mr. Nash, take care of your body; we take care of our souls."

Without further words, Nash turned away. Wesley's journal records:

"We immediately began praying for him and all the despisers."

"As we returned they hollowed and hissed us along the streets. Ten or twelve fine ladies followed us into Richard Marchant's house. Perceiving them to be serious I said "I do not expect the rich of this world to hear me: for I speak plain truth, a thing you know little of and do not desire to know.".

Richard Marchant was a well-to-do Quaker. He complained that people "damaged his trees, stole things out of the ground, and upset his neighbours". So later meetings were held "at Jo Feachams". Wherever that was.

It is sometimes said that Nash later silenced Wesley by getting a band of musicians to drown his voice. There is no evidence of this. However, Richard Graves the Anglican Rector of Claverton, the friend of Ralph Allen, attacked the Methodists, and in the "Spiritual Quixote" introduces an anecdote which may or may not be founded on fact. It tells of an Orator on the Parade who was silenced when Nash gave the order for his orchestra, augmented by French horns and Kettledrums, to strike up "God save the King".

It is a fact, however, that when in 1761 Nash lay dying, the little band of Methodists gathered to pray for his recovery.

It is strange that despite constant visits by John Wesley himself, and his brother Charles; and despite the fact that they had a meeting place in Avon Street in 1742, and built themselves a larger place in 1758, the Methodist cause did not prosper in Bath for some 30 years. In 1741 Wesley described his followers there as "solitary Christians, scarcely known to each other; or prudent Christians, careful not to give offence".

Why? Perhaps even the artisans from whom Wesley drew most support, were affected by the easy way of life; the building boom and constant flow of rich visitors must have enabled them to do very well – and they were not looking for

any revolutionary change in their style of life.

In October 1755 Wesley records: "I preached at Bath. Even here a few are joined together, and hope they shall be scattered no more. I dined with some serious persons in a large stately house standing on the brow of a delightful hill. In this paradise they live in ease, in honour, and in elegant abundance. And this they call retiring from the world." Does he refer to Prior Park? Was Ralph Allen sufficiently astute to have picked out a potential winner at this stage in Wesley's career?

John Wesley's affairs with the opposite sex were not successful. When the right girl came along he did not pop the question – and in the end he settled for the wrong one. In 1751, at 48, he married a widow with grown-up children. It was an unhappy business and eventually she left him. If we were looking for scandal we might seize on the reference in his journal to a "Mrs. W." with whom he stayed in Bath (of course he often used initials in this way and for no nefarious purpose). He tells us that on 17th September 1764, he rode to Combe Grove, a house built in a large grove on the side of a high, steep hill. It is still there today – a hotel now, overlooking Monkton Combe. He says "I found Mrs. W. the same still with regard to her liveliness but not her wildness – in this she was much altered...It was good for me to be there." He stayed the night, and came back on subsequent occasions.

Further research reveals that four years earlier she had sent him several religious letters from London. And in 1763, a year before his visit to Combe Grove, he says, after preaching in Avon Street "I was refreshed by conversation of one come recently from London. How much preferable is her irregular warmth to the cold wisdom of them that despise her? How gladly would I be as she is, taking her wildness and fervour together!"

And that is all. A search of the Bath Chronicle of 1763-4 for arrivals and departures reveals only one "Mrs. W." – a Mrs. Wright.

It was soon after this that Selina, Countess of Huntingdon began to make her influence felt, and caused a lot of confusion on the Methodist scene. It is particularly appropriate that we should consider her just now when her chapel in the Vineyards is undergoing radical change under its new owners the Bath Preservation Trust.

Lady Huntingdon first came to Bath in 1739 with her husband, a friend of Ralph Allen – a significant year as we have seen. Widowed in 1746 she returned to Bath and championed the cause of the Methodists. Because of the kind of society she moved in, even Nash attended in her house when Whitefield her chaplain spoke. His leg was so mercilessly pulled afterwards that he never attended there again!

In 1765 she built her house and chapel in the Vineyards. She persuaded all manner of high ranking people to attend and later she was to build more chapels in Bath and other centres of influence. She was both sincere in her brand of Christianity and domineering towards the preachers.

Horace Walpole, who stayed in St. John's Court, was somewhat amused by Wesley's preaching. He describes him as "eloquent in parts" but "as evidently an actor as Garrick. He acted very ugly enthusiasm." Wesley however says in his

journal of himself that he "fully delivered his soul" on this occasion.

In the recently published letters of the Rev. John Penrose we read an amusing account of his visit to the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in 1766 where the preacher was John Fletcher. He describes the building and its embellishments in considerable detail and goes on..."The Prayers were read very well, 3 Hymns sung very sweetly, and had there been no preaching nor extempore prayer, the whole had been much to my satisfaction. The preacher – had a lank face like Wesley, and true Methodistical hair, a mimic of Whitefield, and his manner theatrical with much vehemence of voice and gesture."

John Wesley had never been such an admirer of the Countess of Huntingdon as some of the other preachers. He objected to her domineering manner. The final rupture came in 1770. The Methodists rejected the narrow Calvinist view favoured by the Countess; they believed and still believe that God's salvation is for all and not for the select few.

The little group of Methodists still meeting in Avon Street must have been a little bemused by all the comings and goings at the Vineyards to which they were not invited. They had their ups and downs and in 1769 the membership fell to 11. About this time on one particular Sunday the appointed preacher failed to turn up; but there was a stranger in the congregation. He offered to speak. Though not a preacher this striking ex-soldier in red coat and with a patch over his eye told of his conversion at Bristol and of his decision to live and die with the Methodist people. His name was Captain Thomas Webb. He had fought with General Wolfe at Quebec and there lost an eye and nearly his life. John Wesley realised his potential and later sent him to America where he became one of the founders of the Methodist church in the US. As an old man he was later to return to Bath to treat his gout. He lived in Charles Street and entertained John Wesley.

By 1777 the time had come to build a better meeting place. Several influential leaders, disillusioned with the Countess, supported the new venture. A site in New King Street was purchased for the erection of what was strictly speaking a Proprietary Chapel. John Wesley and ten other trustees each advanced £100. They expected to draw 5% per annum on their investment. On a cold winter's day in 1777 Wesley laid the foundation stone. He tells that "the wind was piercing cold; yet scarce any of the congregation went away before the sermon". On 11th March 1779 Wesley opened the building. The only mention in the local press was in the Bath Journal which said "We assure the public that the Rev. John Wesley will open King St. Chapel on Thursday next at 11 in the forenoon.". Perhaps William and Caroline Herschel were watching these activities from their house opposite?

Soon after the chapel was brought into use there arose a storm known as the "McNab controversy". McNab a minister stationed in Bath was understandably upset because Wesley invited an Anglican Clergyman from Ireland to preach at King Street during his stay in Bath. This an example of Wesley demonstrating his autocratic nature. He insisted that he personally appointed the preachers. McNab was moved away from Bath and a few of the society resigned in protest.

About this time the Christopher Hotel was coming into prominence as a

Methodist centre. Wesley often stayed there. The landlady was a Mrs. Haddon; she remarried and became Mrs. Grange. She "kept her house private on the Sabbath and her domestics were at liberty to attend public worship". She was certainly to be found amongst the Avon Street congregation, and later at King Street. The King Street trustees used to meet there periodically and charged refreshments to the Trust Accounts!. The Avon Street building was sold in 1782 for £50.

The membership of the society was now a healthy cross-section of the population including titled folk, a doctor of medicine and tradesmen. One family about whom a great deal could be told was the Shums from Germany who were destined to have tremendous influence on the social life of Bath in the 19th Century.

John Wesley's last visit to Bath came on 6th September 1790, six months before his death. A contemporary reporter said: "His white locks were the only sign of his declining life. His brow was smooth, his eyes piercing and brilliant, his complexion ruddy and his voice strong and clear." Not bad for 87!

And so the town described by the Wesleys at one time as "Satan's throne" and "That Sodom of our land" finally came to terms with its critics.

The Nineteenth Century

After the glories of Georgian Bath had passed into memory the city became a somewhat insignificant place, an ordinary provincial town to which the nation's influential leaders no longer came. It can be argued that the Methodist and Evangelical revival "transformed the moral life of the community from sin to piety"; others claim that the old city's economic prosperity was destroyed by the outlawing of the amusements of the wealthy! Middle-class residents certainly came to dominate the life of the city even taking over the exclusive clubs.

The religious census of 1851 reveals that the Bath area had one of the highest attendances in the country. It was estimated that at least 54% of its population attended at least one service, compared with 33% over the country. Church of England accounted for 60%, Methodists 15%. In 1881 Bath had an unofficial religious attendance census. With a total population virtually unchanged there was a reduction of 4,000 attendances compared with 30 years earlier. Interestingly the figures reveal that whereas 50% of the Anglican seats were "free", the Methodists allotted only 30%. See the Appendix for details.

The dominating influence in Victorian Bath church life was "respectability". Servants emulated their employers in attending Divine Service (often in the afternoons). There was a great deal of "do goodism", but it was not until the Salvation Army appeared in the 1880's that any attempt was made, since the days of the early Methodists, to take an enthusiastic and all-embracing form of Christianity to the really poor.

John Wesley had never intended a break away from the Anglicans, and indeed he was eventually treated with great respect by the clergy and invited to fill their pulpits. But throughout the country Methodists were being repelled from the Lord's Table. So Wesley ordained ministers for work in the USA and

so that the people in the country could receive the sacraments. Before he died Wesley realised that separation was inevitable. Then the organisation was established for an independent nation-wide and eventually world-wide Methodist Church.

Meanwhile In Bath

By 1815 there was need for a second chapel in Bath. Walcot Chapel was erected on the site of six old houses on the London Road with 3/4 acre of land extending down to the river, which became a burial ground. The architect was William Jenkins from London and the initial cost £5,500. Due to his Methodist sympathies, Jenkins reduced his fee by 25%. The first evening service (in 1816) was conducted by Rev. Jabez Bunting, destined to become one of the giants of Methodism and four times its President.

The church accommodated 1,200 and the hall below 800. Joseph Pearson, the Sunday School pioneer had opened a school in Parsonage Lane in 1811. He now moved it to Walcot. A day-school opened at Walcot in 1835. The 'Boys' and 'Girls' entrance inscriptions are clearly visible today.

By 1829 the Wesleyans had 15 "chapels" in Bath and as many in the surrounding villages. Many were only houses. About this time the "Primitive Methodists" began to break away from the Wesleyans and enjoyed enthusiastic out-door "camp meetings". Here is a contemporary account from the Bath Chronicle of May 1828:

"On Sunday last a numerous body of Methodists had a camp meeting on Combe Down. Two waggons were placed for the preachers including 3 females. If the goodness of the singing had been in proportion to its loudness, it would have been excellent. After the sermon the Director commanded all to separate into different lots – Camerton friends to the left, Frome to the right, Coleford to the front, Bath stay near the waggons. Each company then began singing different tunes: then kneeled to pray swaying and bawling as loud as they could until black in the face and suffused with perspiration. This continued until the evening when they separated."

They subsequently set up their principal Bath chapel in Westgate Buildings, developing and enlarging the site between 1845 and 1866. By 1851 they had 4 chapels in the area. Due to the break-away movements the Wesleyan total had fallen to 12 by that date.

The original Wesleyan Chapel in New King Street, designed to accommodate 650 was proving to be too small; it was badly ventilated and known as the bakehouse or oven. It was therefore decided to replace it by a completely new building to seat 1,200. This was of Gothic style and designed by James Wilson. It had many seats designed for the poor "their pews having no doors are always open to receive them". The church opened in 1847 and the first preacher was Rev. S. Jackson, President of Conference. This church was destroyed by bombing in 1942. The site is now occupied by Percy Boys' Club. A memorial plaque records the significance of the spot.

The "Wesleyan Reformers", later to become the "United Methodist Free

Church" had also broken away from the Wesleyans. By 1851 they had 9 chapels in the Bath area, the principal one being over a coach manufactory in Broad Street. In 1866 they occupied the chapel in Lower Boro' Walls which today houses the Blackett Press, for in 1907 they moved to a new chapel built in Shakespeare Avenue.

In 1932 the various branches of Methodism were re-united to form the Methodist Church.

Kingswood School

This account would not be complete without some reference, albeit brief, to the most prominent of Bath's Methodist institutions.

The school, as its name reminds us, was initially opened at Kingswood, 3 miles from the heart of Bristol in a coal-mining area where the Methodist cause was particularly strong. This was in 1748. Much of the initial finance was provided by a Mrs. Gumley of Bath and by the Countess of Huntingdon. It fulfilled a long established desire by John Wesley to run a school which would avoid all the defects of the existing schools.

There was a strict regimen: no play and no holidays. The boarders (mainly boys, but some girls among them) rose at 4.00am, studied, worked in the garden, attended services and eventually went to bed at 8.00pm. Initially the children were of Wesley's principal friends. Later, when numbers fell, advertisements were entered in the Bristol newspapers. As more travelling Methodist preachers were engaged it became convenient for them to send their sons to Kingswood.

By 1845 the school's standards were considered cramped and inadequate by comparison with the newer public schools. James Wilson, the architect, advised that the late William Beckford's estate at Bath was up for sale and that a suitable site could be had for £1,050. So the decision was taken to move to Bath. Work started in 1850. James Wilson with all his experience of college design was the architect of the Tudor style buildings. They cost £16,000, were shaped like a letter 'H', built of Combe Down stone and initially designed to accommodate 130 boys. The school was subsequently considerably enlarged. By 1883 the 293 pupils were all the sons of Wesleyan clergymen; from 1923 laymen's sons and recently daughters have been admitted. Until 1921, when the War Memorial chapel was built, the boys regularly attended Sunday services in the Bath Wesleyan churches.

APPENDIX

Methodist Church Attendance 6th November 1881 within Bath city limits

Sittings			Religious Denominations	Attendance		
Total	Unapp-ropriated	App-ropriated		Morning	Evening	Total
			Methodists			
			Free			
430	100	330	Hope, Lower Borough Walls	122	120	242
			Primitive			
125	50	75	Claremont, Snowhill	85	92	177
700	200	500	Westgate Buildings	330	760	1,090
Westgate Buildings – 3 pm, 454. Special Services all day conducted by the Singing Pilgrims						
			Wesleyan			
900	140	760	New King Street	549	435	984
1,002	345	657	Walcot, Cleveland Place	530	594	1,124
230	80	150	Dafford Street, Larkhall	87	83	170
Dafford Street – 3 pm, 64 present						
124	30	94	Milk Street (Mission)	-	108	108
80	75	5	Temperance Hall, Widcombe	55	68	123
200	200	-	Workman's Hall, Holloway	-	78	78
3,791	**1,220**	**2,571**		**1,758**	**2,338**	**4,096**

The Bath Sunday Schools
Returns taken SUNDAY, the 4th December 1881

Teachers & Officials				Children & Young People		
Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
			WESLEYAN			
20	20	40	New King Street	159	193	352
15	12	27	Walcot	103	161	264
4	6	10	Holloway	24	44	68
-	-	6	Larkhall	-	-	75
7	16	23	Milk Street	67	75	142
1	3	4	Temperance Hall	10	20	30
			Primitive Methodist			
8	4	12	Claremont	35	42	77
10	7	17	Westgate Buildings	51	78	129
			United Methodist			
8	5	13	Hope	27	49	76

A SHERIDAN DRAMA

by Hilda Murphy

It was lucky for Richard Brinsley Sheridan that, after an undistinguished career at school (where he was described as 'the most impenetrable dunce') the family moved to Bath. To be released into its pleasures at the age of nineteen and in the heyday of its elegance in 1771 was paradise. Here was the set and here were the properties where he would find the inspiration and the freedom to pour out his talent, inherited from generations of gifted writer ancestors. Richard wallowed in the fun of the coffee houses and the drawing rooms, the balls and the entertainments, and picked up much of the dialogue for his delightful plays. Bath was already so successful as a school for scandal that most of the residents could have taken an 'A' level in it. As the Sheridan character, Surface, puts it: "The licence of invention some people take is monstrous indeed", and, with or without a licence, the whole of Bath went on inventing and reporting.

Of course Richard must fall in love, and of course it could not be straightforward. That would be far too dull. The young Sheridans were friendly with the young Linleys, a family of gifted musicians. Elizabeth Linley was, at sixteen, an established beauty. Acclaimed since childhood as a singer, her voice was worth £1,000 a year to the family. Thomas Moore wrote of her: "The young maid of Bath appears to have spread her gentle conquests to an extent unparallelled in the annals of beauty." Richard did not fall for her, as a dozen men had already done, at first sight. When he did become seriously interested, he kept quiet about it. Good dramatist that he was, he would choose his moment. And, in the meantime, there was no point getting killed in the rush.

Elizabeth had so many admirers, it must have been a problem remembering their names. The Linley parents, however, had practical, indeed, mercenary plans for Elizabeth's future and gave their approval to a wealthy, middle-aged admirer, Mr. Long. Elizabeth, miserable, appealed to Mr. Long to end the engagement, and seeing how unhappy she was, he broke it off. There was her persecution – for it was no courtship – by the unpleasant Captain Mathews, and poor Elizabeth, already a target for Bath gossip because of the broken engagement, now found that her pursuit by Mathews was being followed with avid interest. Elizabeth confided in Richard and his sisters. Her parents being so unsympathetic, and the bandying about of her private life so intolerable, she would go away to France, seek refuge in a convent, and stay there until she came of age. The fact that this musical-comedy plan had the approval of level-headed people anxious for Elizabeth's happiness shows how desperate her situation was. To her father, merely a valuable employee, to her mother, the girl had failed to keep a wealthy suitor, Elizabeth was very nearly driven to suicide. It was agreed that she would disappear to France, Richard taking her there.

On the late evening of Wednesday, 18th March, 1772, Sheridan arrived with a sedan chair at the Linley's home, 11, Royal Crescent. Quickly and quietly, Miss Elizabeth Linley was spirited off to a waiting chaise on the London Road. From England, they crossed to Dunkirk. Poor Elizabeth was very seasick indeed during the rough March crossing in a cargo ship. Richard was deeply concerned. Many years later, when Elizabeth was seriously ill, he recalled the journey and

Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London

wrote; "I then loved her so that, had she died, as I once thought she would, I should have assuredly have plunged with her body into the Grave." When they had landed and were on their way to Calais, Richard told Elizabeth of his affections and heard that they were returned. So, happily, instead of going to the nuns, they went to the priest, and were married. The ceremony had no validity, as the partners were Church of England and minors, but it strengthened their personal bond. The marriage was to remain a secret.

In Bath, the whispering behind fans was thunderous. The gossiping reached fever pitch. The scandal of Miss Linley's disappearance with Mr. Sheridan was a tonic far superior to the waters. Elizabeth's father arrived in France and insisted on her returning to fulfil highly-paid singing engagements. The newly-weds went back to their family homes. They rarely met except in the company of others. "When shall we have another happy half hour?" wrote Elizabeth. "I have not felt real joy since I came from France."

The villain of the piece, Captain Mathews, had to be despatched. Duels ensued; Mathews acknowledged defeat, and left the country. Richard won everybody's approval, but he was seriously wounded and nearly died from loss of blood. However, he rallied, sat up in bed, and asked for the papers. He just wanted to know, he said, whether he was alive or dead. On reading that he was alive, he got up, collected Miss Linley again, and married her again. This was no secret ceremony, but a glittering occasion followed by a ball, rather as the Sheridan prologue says...

"Victorious wreaths their Efforts justly claim
Whose praise is triumph and whose Smiles are Fame."

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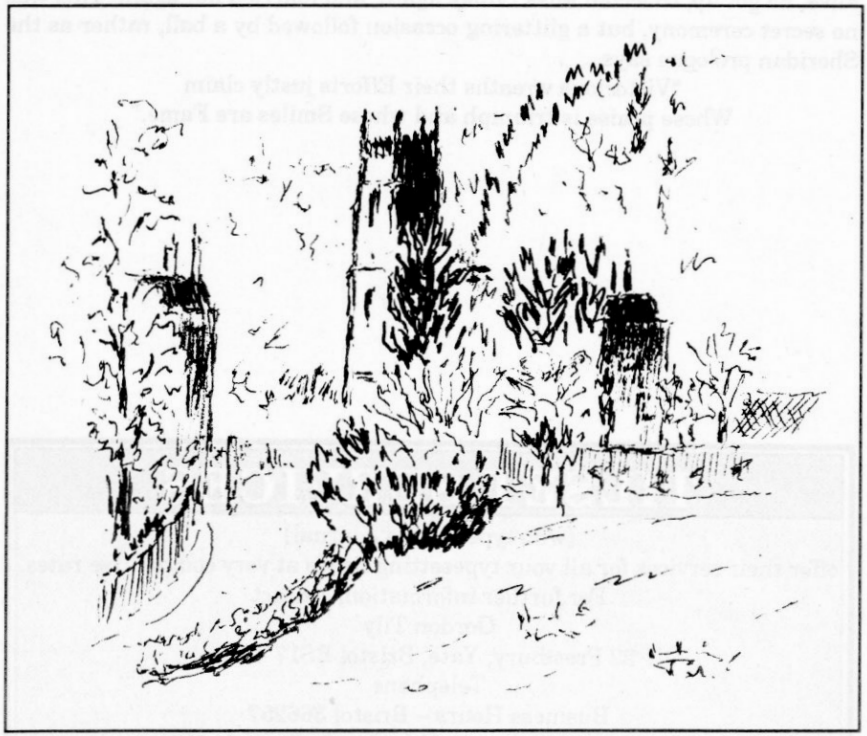
CIVIL WAR AND ST. THOMAS À BECKET

by Connie Smith

History repeats itself in strange and curious ways. This happened recently at Widcombe old church on the southern side of Bath where the minister left, and, until, a new vicar arrived, his seat was kept warm by lay volunteers. Previously something similar occurred in 1655 when William Baker, gentleman, took the church services. The circumstances in which it happened were very different from those of today, but enough records have survived to highlight the circumstances and give a portrait of 17th century life during troubled times.

The small building of St. Thomas à Becket lies within a leafy pastoral setting which comes as something of a surprise as it is within a mile of the centre of the city. Widcombe belies its name since the valley is very narrow and has high-sided slopes. In the hollow, like a hen with chicks, the church nestles among a scatter of age-old dwellings. The hamlet, so charming that it could have been taken as the inspiration for a dreamy Claude painting has earned the reputation of being amongst the best of Bath's beautiful environs, and no wonder.

It is the seclusion of its position which has lead to the survival of its late



St. Thomas à Becket, Widcombe, Bath
Sketched by C. Smith, March 1985.

Medieval architectural style when most of Bath's other old churches have gone, to be replaced in massive Victorian Gothic, Greek, and Byzantine splendour. That is not to say that St. Thomas à Becket escaped the improper, for its interior has been altered from time to time in order to satisfy the fashions and requirements of its congregation. The hand of the 19th century restorer, for instance, was heavy, and little remains of its former late Perpendicular charm. Be that as it may, its external attributes are such that they easily outweigh other disappointing features.[1]

Today the regular attendance at services ebbs and flows. This is due in part to the limited population it serves and its inaccessibility to the motorist and to public transport for the lane in which the building stands is extremely narrow. Nevertheless, an average congregation of 50 or so is maintained. The seats number 80. Its continuing problems undoubtedly stem from its small catchment area, something from which it has suffered for a very long time.

The building is not the first to be erected upon the site. The surviving Parochial Accounts for 1722–1832[2] contain a memorandum that the church was finished in 1502, having been built to replace an older chapel. The walls of the earlier building were removed and the stone was re-used to accommodate the present building. It was dedicated to God in 1502, to the memory of St. Thomas à Becket. No doubt the ceremony was conducted with solemn dignity by the Head of the Diocese in the presence of Prior William Byrd of Bath Priory. Prior Byrd was one of a long order of ecclesiastics who held office in the Benedictine Priory since feudal days. There is some doubt as to whom should be given credit for the building. Some favour William Byrd's predecessor, Sir John Cantelow, but he died in 1499 AD[3].In a Grant of 38 Hen VIII (1546/7) the Books of the Court of Augmentation show that a clothier of Bath was vested with the rectorial tythes of Widcombe, which proved to be a bargain, whereby a profitable source of income was secured for him and his descendants.

His name was Richard Chapman, an Alderman and sometime Mayor, who, no doubt, served his city in the fitting manner of his day. At the same time, being an astute man of business, he was alert to capture any small picking to be gained in that unique upheaval which followed the Suppression of the Monasteries. He had neither patronal interest in the chapel at Widcombe, nor the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the parish (the lordship rights went elsewhere). He sought no personal grandiosity and the squirearchy. Being of a generation of wool merchants and brewers, he was content with his station, and so were his progeny.

On 21st November 1572 several of the churches in Bath[4] were consolidated into a single parish, under a Rector to be appointed by Bath Corporation. In one fell swoop the gift of the living of St. Mary De Stall with its appendant chapel of St. Thomas à Becket, Widcombe, along with St. Mary's within the North Gate, and St. Michael's within the west, and St. James on the south-east rampart, came under the control of the Mayor and City Aldermen. This move was granted under Letters Patent of Elizabeth I although the scheme was held up until 1583 when Dr. William Aubrey, Vicar Capitular and Administrator, was appointed. Bath Corporation paid him £10 - "to promote the Unitying of our Churches" - a bribe in modern times.

Clearly the Widcombe[5] parishioners were up in arms at the proceedings. In the name of the churchgoers, the Churchwardens instituted legal proceedings, the result of which was a sequestration of the living. The people saw Richard Gaye of Lyncombe Farm, a local man, appointed to serve their church, but to no avail. Bath Corporation opposed the measure and succeeded in revoking the action. It signalled the start of a continuing wave of discontent which was to ebb and flow for upwards of three hundred years until the vicarate was revived in 1855. The ferment was caused by dissatisfaction with the perpetual cure of the church. In the eyes of the churchgoers it was a running sore of continual neglect. Though history is shy of the facts it seems that a house was built to accommodate Richard Gaye the 16th century parson. It was evidently never used for its intended purpose, but to this day there is a venerable stone house which once went by the name of 'Parsonage House'. Its site can be verified by an 18th century map of Bath.[6] One hundred years earlier, in the mid-seventeenth century[7] a freestone mason, John Butler, rented the place from Walter Chapman (Lay Impropriator of the great tythes) at £48 per annum.

From the beginning, the parish was never settled with a village or villages, but rather with hamlets and isolated farmsteads. During feudal times, the Priory of Bath held the major part of the land and so it was hardly in the interest of that religious body to allow any large community to establish itself. This is the reason why the 17th century Tithing of Widcombe boasted no local squire of longstanding. The parish was large compared with its neighbours. It prospered well with the eleven others in Bathforum Hundred, although, after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660[8], the decline of the cloth industry affected the whole area.

The Hearth Tax Returns of 1664/5 reveal that the standard of life was well above poverty levels. There were two gentlemen listed for Widcombe and Lyncombe parish; one of these was a clothier. The rest of the inhabitants were yeoman farmers, husbandmen, weavers, masons, and others on the land or working in servicing the city of Bath. The wellbeing of the parishioners was handled by churchwardens who were yeoman farmers, plus a couple of mill holders and clothiers. (Another couple of centuries was to elapse before Bath absorbed the parish). The city was as yet a small place largely contained within its walls, apart from the small overflows to the east and west. Widely known for its medicinal thermal springs, visitors came to "take the cure", but its expansion into a fashionable pleasure resort occurred later.

Throughout the country the early years of the 17th century were fraught with complaints from all sections of the people against the heavy taxation "by new and invented ways",[9] which alluded to the ship money and subsidies imposed by the Crown. The high-handed actions of the Church caused small festerings which continually upset congregations.

Under the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity all persons were expected to attend divine service every Sunday (there was a penalty for not so doing), and also to receive the sacrement three times a year[10]. Stress was laid upon the importance of sermons, for the pulpit was the only means by which the people could be enlightened[11] Literature was practically non-existent and the news-

paper and political discussions in large groups had yet to be invented. A deteriorating situation in Widcombe had occurred which caused genuine grievance and complaint, but this shall be seen later.

In the country at large the real issues were the high taxes, the overbearing policies of the Crown, and the mishandling of Church matters. At last, in 1642, the flood gates burst open. The Civil War started and the true feelings of the people were revealed. With the tidal wave of Puritanism the Established Church was swept away. The ruling powers of the Bishops was abolished. In 1643 came the Presbyterian system with its new Directory of Worship. It replaced the Anglican Prayer Book which a minister was expected to read in church before the morning service. (He could be penalised for non-compliance.).[12] All Common Books of Prayer were to be collected by the churchwardens and constables and disposed of John Evelyn, the diarist, condemned the unrecognisable church services – the prayers were "insipid, tedious and unmethodical" and intoned "in an affected and mysterious manner... like the gibberish of beggars and vagabonds".

At the outset, the clerical purge in Somerset swept away 100 or so Royalist clergymen, and all emoluments were withdrawn. Eventually ministers and elders were formed into "Classes" to administer the Presbyterian system, but it never really flourished in the county. Bath shows that loyalties were divided[13]. John Masters, Rector of the combined parishes, retained his office until the end of the War in 1645. (He regained the position upon the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660). Sharing the Abbey pulpit from 1747 to the end of the Interregnum were Minister George Long with his assistants, and, latterly, Minister William Green. Nicknamed "High Priest of Bath" George Long's official title was "Minister of God and Word". He was one of the few Independents who held a living in the County and his appointment by the Corporation was ratified by the Parliamentary Committee for Plundered Ministers.[14] It was an extremely difficult and crucial role for the young and inexperienced Cambridge graduate. He was only twenty ears of age when he took over. The godly reformation which the puritan clergy was required to perform was austere and orderly. It proved to be too rigid in operation, for there was still a widespread need to pursue traditional recreations. These stemmed from the seasonal cycle of nature and they had been reinforced by accretions of community ritual and also by ties of paternalism. Christenings and marriages, for example, were attended by feasts and gatherings. The new regime forbade dancing and games on Sunday. Maypoles entirely disappeared.[15] Finally, by Parliamentary decree, Christmas Day was appointed as a National Fast. Plum Puddings and feasting were vetoed, though no doubt with little success, and it is generally held that puritans were utterly insincere.

The New Ordnance ordered births, marriages, and burials to be registered before an appointed civilian who took the title of "The Register". Accordingly Edward Sheapard in October 1653[16] was elected, appointed, and sworn to cover the parishes of St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Michael, St. James in the city and the parish of Widcombe and Lyncombe near Bath. Since 1643, marriages were not solemnised in church but before the Mayor, or Justice of the Peace,[17] which is

said to have caused much discontent throughout the whole of Bath. Perhaps it is on this account that George Long, the Minister, was not averse to tempering the moral code of the Puritan Government[18] and would baptise a child, or, if he was "not at home" then Widcombe parishioners individually could approach Samuel Gwynne (sometime the ordained curate) and pay him 1s. 0d for his trouble. It is unrecorded how often these came about, but it does instance how difficult it was to suppress the liturgy. A loophole existed, for if a baptism took place quietly at home who was any the wiser? A burial service was more complicated since the interment took place in a public place, but as it happened at night then it could also be arranged quietly.[19] The Bath Abbey baptismal register from Sept 26, 1653 to Oct 14, 1660, shows that out of 100 entries, four were marked "Baptisms". The rest were entered as "Born". George Long's son, Timothy, was baptised on 14th October 1660 which coincides with the date when the Puritan Order was rescinded; it shows only too clearly in which way his inclinations leaned!

The indignities imposed on the inhabitants of Widcombe and Lyncombe parish by the Civil War had caused them to smart and the continuing demands rubbed salt into places already tender. It was not unnatural that protests came from taxpayers over the cost of repairing the roads. The wear and tear upon thoroughfares were normally borne by the parish in accordance with the ancient legislation of Elizabeth I, but the enormous additional usage on account of the War had been great, and more especially so as three major highways from Bristol, Salisbury, and Wells, passed through the parish. A petition to the County Assize in March 1646 pleaded that "the ways were grown ruinous", and the inhabitants, being for the most part poor, were unable to repair them without help from the city of Bath. The amount asked was £200 and the Mayor was approached for a contribution. No minute in the Council Book, or any item appearing in the Chamberlain's Accounts,[20] throws light upon what occurred, but, 5 years later, in 1651, Robert Bush, the Surveyor of the Highways, complained to the Justices that the people refused to pay for the "re-paving and removing of nuisances". In the event, ruffled feathers were smoothed by some unknown hand, the repairs were carried out, and the matter was settled out of court[21]. Hopefully, the Parish Constables were equally successful after they complained to the Quarter Sessions in 1649/50 when the inhabitants were behind in their "hospital and maimed soldiers moneys".

The refusal of four Widcombe taxpayers to meet their tithe obligations had repercussions upon Minister George Long (people called him "Rector"). He was entitled to receive the small tithes. The Lay Impropriator, Walter Chapman, collected the great tithes[22]; he was a man with whom the inhabitants were in sympathy and harboured no grudge. In fact, in the opinion of some, he was the means of getting a regular priest when Rector Long's term was at an end.

The small tithes had been paid by way of composition for about thirty years. However, those without the money could pay in kind, which usually consisted of wool, hay, and apples. The hay was made into grass cocks in the field (nearly the whole of the parish was enclosed) and the tithe cocks were marked with boughs. When the crop was ready a message was sent to the Rector who then

Widcombe Church, Bath

despatched a hireling to collect his dues. Apples were packed into bushels (about 62 lbs. for which the selling price was usually 12d), but George Long's servant was often told to "help herself from the loft". Such casual arrangements were satisfactory in an agreeable state of society, but when friction and discontent occurred, then traditional practices were in jeopardy. As to monetary transactions, the mid-seventeenth century in Bath, and many other places, produced complications owing to the scarcity of coin. It led to the issue of private tokens which circulated quite freely. Mr. Henry Chapman, a prominent Bath man, produced his own for trading and for profit.

An undisclosed grievance led Henry Chapman, and three others, who owned land in Widcombe, to ignore their small tithe commitment. It is significant that the time was shortly after the "Barebones Parliament" when, in 1653, ecclesiastical patronage and tithes were under attack. Their names were John Biggs, an innkeeper, Robert Fisher, a mill holder and farmer, Samuel Wintle, another wealthy innkeeper, and Henry Chapman previously mentioned[23]. Henry Chapman had scant regard for George Long and openly insulted him. In 1648, during the second Civil War, he had, in defiance, encouraged the Royalist Army Chaplain to read the Common Prayer Book, or preach in St. James' Church in Bath.

Their refusal to pay their small tithes, either in cash or in kind, led to a personal visit from George Long, but he came away empty handed. Drastic measures to a deteriorating situation were sought when he instituted legal proceedings. They were all men of standing and three lived in the city.

George Long's court action was scheduled to be heard in the Court of Public

Exchequor, for which a draft of the depositions on behalf of the plaintiff survives. It is dated 9th April 1656. George Long's plea was not clear cut for he was at a loss to know what were the individual items of tithe. The depositions were taken from many people in order to clarify the situation. There was either a clever conspiracy abroad or folks had remarkably short and confused memories as to what was normally due from each orchard, meadow, or field. The sum at issue was £19. 0s. 2d. Samuel Gwynne, sometime curate, said that during his term of office he had never been paid any tithes, but he had received £5. 0s. 0d or thereabouts, which was agreeable to a composition of £19. 0s. 2d previously made between the parishioners and some former vicars of Bath. In answer to the set questions the ex-officio Rector, James Masters, was understandably evasive. He could not remember what he had received as he had lost his notes and papers.He did, however concede that small tithes of wool, hay, and apples, plus a composition for the rest had been paid by parishioners to former rectors.

Curates were appointed by the Rector and paid by him out of church funds[24]. They came and went in regular succession "leaving a vacant church with only a casual sermon preached occasionally". Such had been the situation from the start of George Long's ministry. This shows the pattern:

	1647	Vacant		part	1652	Samuel Gwynne
part	1648	Thomas Spinks			1653	" "
	1649	" "			1654	Vacant
part	1650	" "			1655	William Baker (never ordained)
	1651	Vacant			1656	William Baker

William Baker, the younger, age 30, gentleman, said he had called at St. Thomas a Becket church sometimes during 1654 in the middle of the day when the church was vacant and said prayers with a bible reading. He explained his duties upon taking over in 1655 as "praying and expounding the scriptures publicly every Lord's Daye in the parish church of Widcombe aforesaid and cattachizing there as often as any of the Parishioners' children were present". He never preached, and Mr. Long, or his Assistance Minister, Mr. William Green, had preached two or three times only. Mr. Long had never administered the sacrement. He had never heard of any parishioners hiring a minister for christenings or burials of the dead.

The depositions show that fundamental change to the traditional pattern of church going was objected to, but there was no hint of direct grievance against the abolishment of the Episcopacy.

Certain parts of the very large and unwieldy parish were completely neglected (it covered most of the city and continued southwards beyond the Avon). Widcombe people were eager to point out how much more regular church services had been within living memory – "before Mr. Long's time the parishioners had prayers every Lord's daie and twice a week besides and the Sacrament at Easter, and Sermons every quarter or thereabouts". The ill feeling against Minister George Long was motivated from a grudge against his lack of personal

church attendance and those of his assistants in supplying the people with their spiritual needs. The frequent changes and apparent difficulties in filling the vacancies probably meant that the Church was underpaying curates for their services. The lead given by George Long was indecisive. He was condemned by one deponent as "a mere time server" and another – "that he was sick of a consumption and unlikely to last more than three or four years".

As it transpired, though, both George Long and William Green were in office at the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. Along with his assistant minister he was one of the signatories to the Royal Address to the King[25]. Did he also nod his head in approval of the festivities when the conduits ran with wine, when they lit the bonfires, and Bath was full of the ringing of bells and "vollies of shot"?

The Royal Arms were ordered to be set up and displayed in all the churches. The painted board in St. Thomas à Becket has survived and still hangs over the chancel arch.

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(23) Ditto.
(24) Ditto.
(25) *New Bath Guide,* Gibbs, 1834, p.28.

(The quote of John Evelyn, the diarist, was taken from "John Evelyn and his Times," B. Saunders, 1970.)
(J. Wroughton's "The Civil War in Bath and N. Somerset" pub. 1973 was particularly helpful).

Connie Smith
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'Roman city', Bath advertises itself, or more obviously 'Georgian city'. In the Roman Baths Museum (the second most profitable tourist attraction in the country) and the 18th-century architectural set-pieces like the Circus and Royal Crescent the sense of the past is strong even to casual visitors. All through the year dozens of volunteer guides can be seen conducting groups of tourists round the sights. Any public lecture on the city is likely to attract a large audience of dedicated Bathonians. So it was perhaps odd that until 1986 there was no local history society as such; though once the idea of having one was mooted it turned out that a variety of people were in fact doing serious local research more or less in isolation. Perhaps the most valuable function of the Group has been to bring them together and develop a feeling of a joint historical enterprise.

To discourage merely spectator members from joining, the word 'research' was put into the title and the constitution drafted to make the Group 'open to individuals actively engaged in research on Bath history, or professionally concerned with its historical or archaeological documentation, or otherwise knowledgeable on the subject'.This was a wise move. Not all our 70-80 members are working currently on local topics, but they are aware that some contribution is sooner or later hoped for. This may be in the form of a research paper delivered to and then discussed by members at the monthly meetings. Several visiting speakers are also invited each season. The seminar and panel formats are also being tried, and we have an annual meeting of a more social character.

The Group's historical aims are serious. Too much writing about Bath has been predictably parochial, antiquarian, anecdotal, lacking historical grasp and innocent of broader contexts and theory. At the same time there are enormous gaps in knowledge, even for the much written-about 18th century where a few glamorous topics and vivid personalities have usurped most of the attention. The ultimate aim of the Group must be to encourage investigation on a broad front and at a professional level – though by a predominantly 'amateur historian' membership. Already we have secured a small financial grant from the local authority to start a record of source materials for Bath history in regional repositories. Several members continue to work on a long-standing project pre-dating the formation of the Group, ie the Survey of Old Bath, concerned with the documenting and mapping of the pre-Georgian city especially from the rich holdings of leases in the Bath Record Office. This work is already proving a rich source for Stuart Bath and has lately been assisting the RCHME/Ordnance Survey which expects to publish two historical Bath maps in 1989. The Group itself produces a regular newsletter for members but has been saved the effort of starting a journal proper by the existence of other local outlets, including a relatively new commercial venture, Bath History, whose second volume appeared in May 1988 and to which some Group members have already contributed. As we become better-known we attract more research enquiries, and as our membership and contacts grow we find a surprisingly wide range of local knowledge and expertise to call on. Certainly the Group was needed.

Trevor Fawcett

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Temple Local History Group whose members are concerned with all aspects of Local History in the central area of the City.

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In addition to our magazine and monthly meetings, we also arrange talks, slide shows, guided tours, outings and exhibitions.

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